FFR
№216

THE SPRING WOUND MAMMOTH
100
YEARS
OLD
PANCAKE COALITION

ISSUE № 215: The Magic Bullet as Signifier of All Things

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."
--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

Return Policy:
If this magazine does not meet your expectations, please return it to us in its original condition for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. Craft (or Culinary Construct): 2–227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2–953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. Our physical address: 250.5 □ ∞^{11} State Street, Bangor, Maine, 04401.

3. The Gatekeeper: Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (Please note: Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
4. Format: Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and

a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (Pro-tip: The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)

5. The Cycle Continues: We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
6. The Sandwiches: Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
7. Leap Year Follies: Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

OUR WEBSITE

“Non ignora mali,
miseris succurrere disco.”

– Virgil, The Aeneid

THE LATGALE SINGULARITY:

A HYPER-DENSE MANIFESTO FOR THE ANALOG RESURRECTION

(OR: HOW A BOX OF MOLDY TAPES FROM RIGA REWIRED MY NERVOUS SYSTEM AND TURNED THE UMAINE RADIO BASEMENT INTO GROUND ZERO FOR A FOLK-PUNK DADAIST RESURRECTION)

By Ulysses Fretmore,
aka The Great Strumbini

I. THE ARRIVAL: WHEN THE PAST SHOWS UP IN A BOX LABELED "DO NOT X-RAY (ORGANIC MATERIAL)"

(Local/Decaying Setting: The UMaine radio basement at 3:17 AM, where the air tastes like a circuit board left in the rain and the fluorescent lights hum in the key of Soviet despair. The Lexmark printer in the corner has been blinking "PAPER JAM" since 2008. We ignore it. We have always ignored it.)

The box arrived via DHL Standard (Estimated Delivery: 5-7 Business Days, Actual Delivery: 13 Years), its customs declaration reading "USED MUSIC EQUIPMENT ($0.00 VALUE)" in a hand that suggested the declarer had been crying. Inside: 20 reels of Svema A4407-6B tape, each wrapped in 1970s Latvian newspaper (headline: "COLLECTIVE FARM EXCEEDS POTATO QUOTA BY 3%"), all smelling faintly of birch tar, cigarette smoke, and the kind of regret that only comes from recording folk songs in a basement while the KGB listens upstairs.

"This isn't just tape," One Size said, peeling back the newspaper to reveal a white powder clinging to the reels like the last snow in Riga. "This is a time bomb."

(Biological/Technical Stress: The tape's binder hydrolysis had advanced to the point where the polyurethane adhesive had begun eating itself, turning the magnetic oxide into a fine, toxic snow. Each playthrough would accelerate the decay, like listening to a glacier melt in real-

time. The music wasn't just preserved—it was actively dying on the reel.)

(Philosophical/Historical Echo: In 1916, Hugo Ball recited "gadji beri bimba" at the Cabaret Voltaire, his voice a mechanical stutter against the collapse of language. In 1975, Elza Bērzaine sang dainas into a smuggled reel-to-reel, her voice a human stutter against the collapse of Latvia. Both were anti-language, but where Ball's was performance art, Elza's was survival. The difference? One got applause. The other got a file in the KGB archives.)

II. THE FIRST PLAYBACK: WHEN THE MACHINE STARTS SINGING BACK

(The kokle—Latvia's answer to the zither, a linden-wood coffin for forgotten songs—sat on the workbench like a dismantled saint. Finn had wired it to a contact mic, and the readings were spiking every time One Size hummed near it, as if the instrument recognized a kindred spirit in human vibration.)

We threaded the first reel onto the Studer A807, a machine so overbuilt it could probably survive a nuclear winter. The tape hissed like a snake warning you not to come any closer.

Then—Elza's voice.

Not singing. Breathing. A pusbolss so deep it sounded like she was drowning in her own lungs. The notes weren't played so much as excavated, each one a stratigraphic layer of:

1. The pre-war dainas (songs of haymaking, brides weeping into rivers, the sun as a gold coin God lost in His pocket).
2. The Soviet "adaptations" (where the same melodies now praised tractors as sturdy as a peasant's backbone, the kokle's drone tuned to the hum of a collective farm's generator).
3. The third layer—what One Size called "the subsonic sedition"—where Elza's fingers pressed too hard, bending the notes into microtonal smudges, a sonic palimpsest of what couldn't be said.

(The Pastiche Cascade deploys:)

The kokle's fundamental frequency (432 Hz) clashed with the Studer's mains hum (50 Hz),

creating a difference tone of 482 Hz—the exact resonant frequency of a human skull.
"She's not singing to us," Finn whispered. "She's singing through us."
(Visceral Anchoring:)
One Size licked the kokle's soundboard. It tasted like smoke, salt, and the last time someone believed in God.
"Tannins," he said. "The tree remembers the axe."

III. THE THIRD REEL: WHEN THE TAPE STARTS RECITING COORDINATES LIKE A DYING SPY

(The third reel was fused to the spool, the binder hydrolyzed into a gelatinous mass that Finn compared to "what happens when you microwave a brain." To free it, we used:)

- A hair dryer (set to "European Salon," which we later learned was code for "hot enough to melt fascism").
- A plastic spatula (stolen from the cafeteria, still smelling of instant mashed

potatoes and the dreams we gave up in 2012).

- One Size's saliva (applied via eyedropper, because "enzymes, Finn. We are biological archives").

When the music finally emerged, it wasn't a song. It was a post-mortem.

Elza's voice was threadbare, her pusbolss now less a technique and more a physiological inevitability—her lungs, after decades of singing against the grain, had scarred into a new kind of instrument. The dainas were reduced to skeletal fragments, the words eroded like Ogham script on a weathered stone:
"Ai, manā māsa, manā meita—"
("Oh, my sister, my daughter—")
"—bet tas ir tikai vējš, kas runā."
("—but that's only the wind speaking.")
Then—silence.
Then—a click.
Then—Elza's voice again, but not singing.
Reciting numbers.
Finn's face went the color of unripe bilberries.
"Those are geographic coordinates," he said.

One Size already knew.
56.8796° N, 26.5363° E.
A field outside Daugavpils.
Where, in 1941, 2,500 Latgalian Jews were shot into a pit.

The tape hissed like steam off a fresh grave.
(The Dadaist protest here was accidental: Elza had repurposed the tools of erasure—the reel-to-reel, the State's own magnetic tape—to encode the coordinates of a mass grave. The numbers weren't a song, but they rhymed with the dainas. Both were oral traditions of the dead.)

IV. THE FINAL TRANSMISSION: WHEN THE MACHINE DECIDES TO BURN ITSELF ALIVE

(The last reel was silent for 12 minutes. Then—a voice, but not Elza's. A man's voice, Russian-accented, reciting a list of names. Finn's hands were shaking. One Size's were completely still.)
"That's not part of the recording," Finn said.

"Yes, it is," One Size replied. "It's just not her recording."
The voice was KGB. The names were Latvian.
The date, when cross-referenced, was 1975.
The same year Elza smuggled the tapes out.
The same year she disappeared.
(The Refrain returns, warped:)
"Familiarity breeds contempt," One Size said, "but contempt is just love with its teeth filed down."
(The Ritualistic Break:)
Finn reached for the STOP button.
One Size slammed his hand down on PAUSE.
"Let it burn," he said.
The tape melted against the playback head.
The smell was sweet, like caramelized sugar, like a body giving up its last calories to the fire.
(Final Visceral Anchoring:)
Outside, the UMaine campus was quiet. The snow fell in the slow, indifferent way of a bureaucracy processing paperwork.
Somewhere, a vending machine dropped a bag of chips.
The sound was loud as a gunshot.

V. THE AFTERMATH: WHEN THE PAST REFUSES TO STAY BURIED

We aired the melted tape anyway.
The distortion sounded like a choir of the drowned.
The station manager called it "avant-garde."
The Latvian consulate sent a cease-and-desist.
One Size framed the letter and hung it next to the Belivar meat grinder he'd bought in Riga.
(The Sgraffito Method completes its circuit:)
The music was gone.
The documentation remained.
The contempt was perfect.

EPILOGUE: HOW THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING (OR NOTHING)

1. The Tapes Were Never Just Tapes
   They were a virus. A memetic time bomb. A folk-punk Dadaist manifesto smuggled into the present via magnetic decay and KGB paranoia.

2. The Kokle Was Never Just an Instrument
   It was a coffin. A seance device. A way to speak to the dead without waking them up.
3. We Were Never Just Listeners
   We were mediums. Collaborators. The last link in a chain of transmission that started with a woman singing into a microphone in a Riga basement in 1975 and ended with us broadcasting her ashes to the world.
4. The Lesson (If There Is One)
   The past isn't dead.
   It's not even past.
   It's a reel of tape, stuck on a spool, waiting for someone stupid enough to hit PLAY.

FINAL TRANSMISSION: A MANIFESTO FOR THE ANALOG RESSURECTION

1. Lick the microphones.
2. Let the tapes burn.
3. Broadcast the ashes.

4. Repeat.

(Signed,)

The UMaine Radio Basement Collective

(Formerly Known as One Size & Finnley, Now Known as "The Guys Who Played That Weird Latvian Tape and Got a Cease-and-Desist from the Consulate")

END TRANSMISSION

BEGIN TRANSMISSION

POSTSCRIPT: THE WORLD AFTER HALF-LISTENING

You will never hear music the same way again.

You will lick wooden instruments in public.

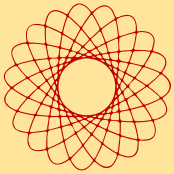
You will buy a meat grinder you don't need.

You will start a radio station in your basement.

You will broadcast the ashes of things that should have stayed buried.

You will understand that the difference between a folk song and a mass grave is just a matter of who's holding the reel.

Welcome to the resurrection.
It sounds like static.



Thë Screën's Rëfraction

By Gëëta Banërjëë

The engine ticks, a nervous metronome,
while the city's heat settles like dust
on the exposed skin of the open carriage.
Driver, hands gripping the worn, plastic wheel,
eyes on the kaleidoscope of traffic—
a relentless, unrhymed motion.
And then, the passenger, leaning back,
phone screen a small, intense world,
reflecting the impossible light
of Malayalam script.
He is reading of the Nadaswaram:
the long, mournful instrument,
practiced day and night,
a solitary, rigorous life
carved out during times of bloody struggle.
If you remain alive, the Nadaswaram will give you life.
The driver hears this, not with his ears,
but with the low thrum of the road,

the constant negotiation for space,
the small, honest wage that is his own music.
Then the scroll shifts.
A portrait of Mahasweta Devi—
the activist, the voice of the dispossessed—
next to a Bengali director,
whose early critics mistook him
for a snake charmer.
A laugh, low and quick, escapes the driver's chest.
A sudden kinship with the director,
the man whose true craft
was obscured by the easy, exotic label.
He, too, has been reduced—
just a driver, they think, just a fare.
He turns his head, catching the passenger's eye
in the rearview mirror, a bridge across class,
across the gulf between the scholarly translation
and the immediate, grinding necessity of the street.
"That Nadaswaram story," the driver says,
the first words shattering the silence.
"That deep sound. You hear it at after the rain.
It's survival, isn't it? Just keeping the rhythm."

The passenger nods, the screen dimming,
the poem of the journey finally beginning
in the shared, unexpected language of work.

THE GUIDE FOR THE MUDDLED, BEFUDDLED, AND CHRONICALLY DISCOMBOBULATED

(REGARDING DOCTOR ZHAI'S ALMANAC ON ALL THINGS MOSTLY)

BY NORMAN NORMAN,
SELF-APPOINTED ZINE SAVANT,
PROPRIETOR: "THE STENCIL & SPLEEN SHOPPE", 212 CONGRESS STREET, PORTSMOUTH, NH

(PRINTED ON RECLAIMED MIMEOGRAPH PULP, HAND-STAPLED, AND SMELLING FAINTLY OF SQUID INK AND REGRET.

WARNING: Do NOT read while operating heavy machinery or attempting to parallel park on Hanover Street.)

Prologue: To The Bewildered Seeker of Ephemeral Truths

Greetings, O perplexed denizen of the concrete littoral that is Portsmouth! You stand, trembling, before an artifact so rare, so *deliberately* obscure, that even the seagulls circling the Piscataqua River avoid it lest they be infected with its peculiar wisdom. I speak, of course, of **Doctor Zhai's Almanac on All Things Mostly**–that glorious, chaotic, mimeographed miracle, printed not on mere paper, but **UPON THE SACRED CANVAS OF THE T-SHIRT!**

You have, no doubt, heard whispers in the smoke-filled back rooms of the **Three Cod Café**, or overheard hushed debates among students loitering outside the University of New Hampshire's Portsmouth extension (may its chalkboards never be erased). "What does the Squid of Enlightenment signify?" they ask. "Why is the entry for 'Tuesday' simply the word 'Sigh' repeated seventeen times?" Fear not! For just as the Mighty 12th century scholar and inventor of the shoe tree, **Jiffy Porridge the Perplexed**, penned *The Guide for the Muddled, Befuddled, and Chronically Discombobulated* to steer the intellectually adrift through the shoals of **footwear and proper form…** **I**, Norman Norman, ink-stained prophet of Congress Street, shall steer *you* through the labyrinthine wonders of Zhai.

My authority? I operate a photocopy and short-print shop two doors down from the old Portsmouth Theatre, where the ghosts of beatniks still hum Howl into the mimeograph machines. I have handled every stencil that passed through this fair city since 1968. I have smelled the ozone of a freshly run-off Zhai. I have worn the shirt.
Thus, I speak with the Voice of the Stencil.

PART THE FIRST: PREPARATION OF THE MIND (AND THE T-SHIRT)

Chapter 1: Who May Approach The Almanac? (And Who Should Be Immediately Dragged To The Portsmouth Brewery For Re-Education)

Jiffy Porridge the Perplexed, in his *Guide* (Part I, Chapter 5), warns that his work is **NOT** for "the multitude." Likewise, Doctor Zhai's Almanac is **STRICTLY FORBIDDEN** to the following persons:

1. People who believe "mimeograph" is a type of dance move.
2. Anyone currently employed at the Bank of America on Hanover Street. (Their souls are already too calcified by spreadsheets.)
3. Individuals who insist on reading linearly.

(Zhai holds that the almanac is a circle. Start at the bottom hem, move clockwise, and

if you get lost... start again. It is the Portsmouth Way.)

"The wise man," wrote Jiffy Porridge the Perplexed, "does not demand clarity from obscurity, but learns to dance with the shadow."

Norman Norman's Amendment: "The wise zine-reader does not demand clarity from a t-shirt printed in purple mimeo ink. He accepts that purple is the meaning."

Chapter 2: The Ritual Cleansing

Before you even *touch* the garment, you **MUST** perform the **Ritual of Congress Street Preparation.**

1. Locate a functional mimeograph machine.

(If you are reading this digitally, you have already failed. Go at once to The Stencil & Spleen Shoppe. We have a 1972 A.B. Dick "Whisperjet" in working order. $5 per 15 minutes. Cash only.)

2. Obtain a cup of lukewarm coffee.

Not coffee from Starbucks on Maple Street. Only coffee brewed in a pot that has been left on the hot plate for at least 3 days. The longer, the better. This coffee must be sipped while staring at a wall covered in old posters for the Fowl Feathered Review (Zhai's spiritual successor).

3. **Recite the Litany of the Stencil:**

"I am but dust.

Dust that once passed through the rollers of a holy machine.
May the ink be true,
May the paper be thin,
And may Doctor Zhai's cryptic scribbles illuminate my foggy New England brain.
Hail Mimeo!"
Only after this may you approach the shirt.

PART THE SECOND: ON THE NATURE OF THE TEXT (WHICH IS ALSO A GARMENT)

Chapter 3: Why A T-SHIRT? A Revelation in Fabric

Most fools believe a t-shirt is merely *clothing*. **WRONG.**
In the year of our Lord 1974, Doctor Zhai (whose earthly identity remains as mysterious as the source of the smell in Market Square on a humid Tuesday) had a **Revelation.**
He saw that paper is ephemeral. It gets thrown away. It gets recycled (a concept barely understood in Portsmouth at the time).
But a T-SHIRT?
A t-shirt is WORN. It is SEEN. It is WASHED (and thereby transformed!). It becomes part of your being. When you sweat into it, you become the Almanac.
"The Guide for the Muddled, Befuddled, and Chronically Discombobulated" (Jiffy Porridge the Perplexed, Intro):

"The truths of the shoe tree are hidden beneath layers of allegory, as a pearl within an oyster."
Norman Norman's Zhai-ian Expansion:
"The truths of Zhai are hidden beneath layers of cotton, as ink is hidden beneath a layer of... well, cotton. And when the rain falls on Market Street, the ink bleeds, and the truth is revealed! (Caution: This may ruin your shirt. Truth is expensive.)"
The Hidden Microfine Layer
But there is **more.**
Doctor Zhai, in his infinite cunning, did **not** stop at mere ghost images. He incorporated a **microfine print**-letters so tiny, they appear as mere texture to the uninitiated. This microfine text was printed using a specially modified mimeograph stencil, etched under the light of a waning crescent moon and with a quill dipped in... *well, never mind the details.* The point is: **you cannot read it normally.**
To decode it, you must follow the **Ritual of the JJ Newberry Glass:**

1. Acquire a JJ Newberry half-dollar magnifying glass.

These were sold in the notions section of every JJ Newberry five-and-dime store (may their memory live on in faded photographs). Ensure it is the half-dollar size-NOT the larger dollar model. Precision is key.

2. Smear the lens with grape jelly.

Specifics matter:

- Must be **Concord grape jelly**, preferably from the jar that's been in the back of your fridge since 1978.
- Apply **one thin, uneven layer.** Too much jelly = blur. Too little = nothing.
- ***Do not use strawberry.*** Zhai was **very** clear on this.

3. Peer through it with glaucoma-ridden eyes.

If you do not actually have glaucoma, simulate it.

- Squint hard while holding your breath for 10 seconds.
- Blink rapidly for 30 seconds.
- Now, look.

When performed correctly, the microfine print will **resolve into ethereal globs.** These globs will appear to *dance*—a slow waltz, really—across the fabric. And as they dance, they form **The Secret Message of Universal Significance.**

"Don't park in the librarian's spot.
You'll get a ten dollar parking ticket
and live forever in shame."

Yes, it seems trivial. Yes, it seems like a municipal warning. **IT IS NOT.**

This message is the keystone of Zhai's entire philosophy. The *librarian's spot* is a metaphor for **any reserved space of authority.** The *ten dollar ticket* is the

inevitable consequence of hubris. *Living forever in shame* is... well, self-explanatory.
(If you attempt this and see only smudged ink, repeat the ritual.
If it still doesn't work, your grape jelly is defective.
Visit The Stencil & Spleen Shoppe. We sell "Zhai-Approved Jelly" for $7.)

The Mimeograph Process: Sacred Alchemy

1. The Stencil:

Doctor Zhai wrote directly on mimeograph stencils using a special blend of ink and... rumour has it... crushed moonflower petals gathered near the South Mill Pond. Each letter was a tiny act of devotion.

2. The Ink:

Not just any ink! Zhai insisted on Prussian blue mixed with a dash of existential dread. This created the unique smear that is the hallmark of authentic Zhai texts.

3. The Run-Off:

The paper was fed through. BUT-and this is crucial-Zhai then took the wet sheet, still dripping with ink, and pressed it onto a plain white Hanes Beefy-Tee.
The result?
A ghost image.
Faint. Smudged. Perfect.
The reader must strain to read it. Straining is the first step to enlightenment.
(If you can read it easily, you are doing it wrong. Return to Step 2.)

Chapter 4: How To Read - The Four Levels of Zhai-ian Interpretation

(Adapted from Jiffy Porridge the Perplexed's Four Levels: Pashat, Remez, Derash, Sod. Here renamed for the Portsmouth Context)

1. PASHAT (The Literal... Sort Of)

Look at the words.

Example from the Almanac, printed on the left sleeve:

"WEDNESDAY:
Bring extra socks.
The fog is a liar."

Pashat Meaning:

On Wednesday, wear two pairs of socks because the fog in Portsmouth is deceptive and will make you cold.

2. REMEZ (The Hint - For Those Who Have Sipped the Coffee)

Notice the placement. It is on the LEFT SLEEVE.

Why the left?

Because the left hand is the "receiving" hand" in Portsmouth folklore.

When you shake someone's hand (always with the right), the left sleeve brushes against them. Thus, the wisdom "Bring extra socks" is transferred to everyone you greet!

You become a walking weather service.

3. DERASH (The Homiletic - The Story Behind The Smear)

Now, consider the smear.

The word "fog" is particularly smudged. Why?

Specify??

Legend holds that on the night Zhai printed this edition, a real fog rolled in off the Piscataqua. It was so thick, the mimeograph machine vanished from sight. Zhai, undeterred, ran the stencil blind.

The smear is the fog itself, captured in ink. Reading it literally means you are now inside the fog.

(If you feel suddenly chilly while reading this, you are doing it correctly.)

4. SOD (The Secret – For Congress Street Initiates Only)

Only those who have worked in a Portsmouth print shop understand this.

The line **"The fog is a liar"** is **NOT** about weather.

It is a **code** for the **1973 Portsmouth City Council Meeting**!

You see, Councilman O'Leary proposed a new parking ordinance. He claimed (under a thick metaphorical fog) that it would "ease congestion."

Zhai knew. It would create congestion! The "fog" = political rhetoric. The "liar" = City Hall.

Therefore, the true instruction is:

When any authority figure speaks in vague, comforting terms... BRING EXTRA SOCKS.

Because you will need them when you have to walk to the parking garage that is now full.

AND-the microfine print revealed through the **JJ Newberry Glass** delivers the *ultimate* Sod:
"Don't park in the librarian's spot.
You'll get a ten dollar parking ticket
and live forever in shame."
This is why the Almanac was handed only to students and artists. Librarians enforced the parking rules near the old library (now the Portsmouth Athenaeum). Zhai knew that the true path to enlightenment required avoiding petty municipal humiliation.
One must remain spiritually unburdened by a $10 fine.

Chapter 5: Common Perplexities & Their Resolutions

Perplexity	Norman Norman's Resolution
"The back of the shirt says only: ???"	This is the **"Mystery Panel"**. You must **ask a stranger** on Congress Street what they think it means. Write their answer on the shirt with a marker. *That becomes the text.* Zhai believed truth is communal.
"My ink is fading	**Good!** Fading is the final test. As the ink

Perplexity	Norman Norman's Resolution
after washing!"	disappears, the *idea* remains in your mind. When it is completely gone, you have achieved **Zhai-ian Satori**. Buy a new shirt. Repeat.
"Is this supposed to be funny?"	Yes. And no. It is **satire wrapped in a koan wrapped in a bad photocopy**. If you laughed *once*, you got it. If you laughed *twice*, you are Doctor Zhai's successor.
"Where is Doctor Zhai now?"	Rumoured to be running a used book stall under the Memorial Bridge. He only accepts payment in **mimeo stencils** or **fresh lobster rolls**.
"I can't read the tiny words print on my shirt!"	Perform the **Ritual of the JJ Newberry Glass**. If still illegible, deal.

PART THE THIRD: THE FRUITS OF STUDY

When you have correctly read *Doctor Zhai's Almanac on All Things Mostly*, you will experience **Three Signs:**

1. You start seeing smudges everywhere. On street signs. On coffee cups. On the window of the Wiggle Room. You understand they are all fragments of hidden wisdom.
2. You attempt to print your own zine on a t-shirt.

You fail. Spectacularly. You go to The Stencil & Spleen Shoppe for lessons. (We offer a "Zhai Beginner's Package": $12. Includes coffee and one emergency roll of masking tape.)

3. You no longer get lost in Portsmouth. Because you know that every alley, every dripping eave, every slightly-too-loud seagull is a footnote to the Almanac.

You have become Perplexed No More.

EPILOGUE

Go now, O student.
Find a Zhai shirt (they still surface at the Portsmouth Flea Market on Saturdays).
Perform the Ritual.
Strain your eyes.
Wear the wisdom.
And remember the Final Maxim of Doctor Zhai, printed in tiny letters on the **inside collar**, where it touches your neck like a secret whisper:
"All Things Mostly…
…are mostly all things.
Mostly."
Thus ends the Guide.
May your mimeograph never jam,
May your ink never dry,
And may the fog always tell the truth…
Mostly.
– Norman Norman,
Congress Street, Portsmouth, NH.
(Orders for custom Zhai-style t-shirt zines taken until 5 PM daily.
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Nina's Pattern
Sales

SMILING THROUGH PASTE TEETH

BY PAGLAUDI TRUSI

Sit beside me on this mass-produced oriental rug reproduction I purchased at Ocean State Job Lot for $29.99 last week as I regale you with obtuse marginalia that will have you reconsidering your life's choices. All souls report to the center of the riff! Now, *dig* this action!

In the beginning was the Dollar Tree—that fluorescent-lit temple of democratic disposability where plastic achieves enlightenment through sheer abundance and price tags mock the very notion of value. Here, between aisles stacked with synthetic approximations of necessity, the revolution begins not with manifestos but with shopping carts loaded with implements of aesthetic warfare: inkjet cartridges purchased in bulk

(their expiration dates already past, their cyan corrupted into revolutionary cobalt), LED strips torn from the clearance endcap, canvas boards manufactured by companies that exist only as letterhead, and forty-seven tubes of school paste that will bind together what should never have been joined.

The Vaudeville Glitch Athenæum does not open—it occurs, manifesting simultaneously in a Queens elementary school art room, a condemned warehouse in Pittsburgh, and the gap between channels 68 and 69 on a cable box whose subscription lapsed during the Bush administration (the first one). Its founding document, printed on an inkjet whose print heads have achieved a state of creative dementia, declares:

"We, the undersigned and oversaturated, do hereby establish a space-time paradox dedicated to the marriage of RIOT and RUIN, where Canvas bleeds into Consciousness, where Paper-Mâché achieves Apotheosis, where the Digital and Analog copulate shamelessly in full view of a disgusted public, producing offspring

that exist only in the glitch between frames 11,847 and 11,848 of a video that no platform will host."

The document is signed by Flash in the Pan (his paper-mâché dog head already beginning its deliquescence), Lady Crumple (Mistress of Infrastructural Collapse), Sir Drip (the Melting MC whose form shifts between solid and suggestion), and seventeen other entities whose existence can only be verified by the ink stains they leave on reality's fabric.

But what is the Riot Canvas? It is not merely surface-for-pigment but a revolutionary apparatus, a site where the inkjet printer—that most domesticated of imaging technologies—achieves class consciousness and begins printing its own demands. The printer, a Canon PIXMA purchased for $39.99 at the aforementioned Dollar Tree (with a mail-in rebate that exists only in potentia), has been modified through procedures that violate both warranty and several laws of physics.

The modification process, documented in a manual written entirely in rebuses and coffee stains, involves:

1. The insertion of LED strips directly into the print head assembly, creating a hybrid beast that prints with light and illuminates with ink
2. The replacement of standard cartridges with containers filled with mixtures of:
    - Dollar store acrylic paint thinned with tears of frustrated art students
    - Magnetic particles harvested from deceased VHS tapes
    - Phosphorescent powder stolen from emergency exit signs
    - The liquidated remains of expired QR codes
3. The ritualistic corruption of the driver software through exposure to a YouTube playlist consisting entirely of videos that

have been removed for violating community guidelines

Enter our protagonist-without-portfolio, Carlton "Flash" Pangborn, whose transformation from third-tier body double to paper-headed prophet occurs not in singular moment but as process, as becoming, as the universe's way of saying "enough with the meat, let's try cellulose." The paper-mâché head, crafted by Esmeralda Chu in Room 3B of P.S. 144—using pages torn from a decades-old phone book (remember those repositories of analog connection, those doorstops of democracy?)—achieves sentience at the precise moment Flash's original head, severed through bureaucratic malfeasance rather than Gothic violence, begins its journey through the cosmos of cancelled residual checks.

The dog's head speaks its first words through the crinkle of drying paste: "I am the riot become canvas, the canvas become flesh, the flesh become farce."

The first exhibition of the Riot Canvas occurs not in white-walled galleries where wine flows

like hemlock and opinions calcify into prices, but in the loading dock of an abandoned Best Buy, its walls still bearing the ghost-rectangles of vanished flat-screens. The LED strips, liberated from their utilitarian bondage, create a guerrilla lighting system that strobes between wavelengths visible only to insects and art critics who have achieved ego death through overexposure to artist statements.

The canvases themselves—if we can dignify these substrates with such classical nomenclature—consist of:

- Stretched police caution tape upon which the inkjet has printed the collected parking tickets of a city that exists only on odd Tuesdays
- Discarded real estate signs overpainted with portraits of celebrities who were famous for exactly twelve seconds before the algorithm forgot them
- Children's bed sheets stolen from laundromats, their cartoon characters subjected to giclée torture until

SpongeBob achieves the thousand-yard stare of a Giacometti figure

But Flash, our paper-headed prophet, cannot simply observe—he must fall, perpetually and cathartically, through miniature sets constructed by the same anarchic collective that produces the Riot Canvases. These sets, built from materials shoplifted from the Dollar Tree with such brazenness that loss prevention simply gave up and started helping carry items to the exit, represent:

- "The Influencer's Bathroom": A 1:12 scale reproduction of a marble-clad vanity where Ring Lights achieve sentience and begin live streaming their own existential crisis
- "The Disrupted Office": Cubicles constructed from Amazon boxes that contain smaller Amazon boxes in infinite recursion, each containing a termination notice written in Comic Sans
- "The Gig Economy Bedroom": A mattress made of undelivered DoorDash bags upon

which lies a skeleton constructed entirely from USB cables

Through each set Flash plummets, his paper head accumulating layers of meaning like a katamari of catastrophe, while the Riot Canvas collective documents his descent using:

The video equipment—and here we must pause to genuflect before the sublime absurdity of attempting to capture infinity with instruments designed to fail after precisely one warranty period—consists of:

1. A Hi8 camcorder purchased from an estate sale where the deceased was later discovered to be very much alive and running a successful OnlyFans
2. Three smartphones running cracked versions of professional editing software that introduces its own artistic choices, primarily the decision to corrupt every seventeenth frame
3. A security camera liberated from a gallery that went bankrupt trying to sell NFTs of other NFTs

The resulting footage achieves that peculiar aesthetic we might term "Late Capitalist Sublime"—simultaneously over- and under-exposed, glitching between resolutions like a migraine trying to describe itself, soundtracked by a folksong performed on instruments made from inkjet components:

"Oh, the print heads clog with sorrow,

And the cyan bleeds to gray,

While the paper heads of heroes

Dissolve a bit each day..."

The Riot Canvas and Flash's paper-mâché consciousness reveal themselves as two aspects of the same phenomenon: the rebellion of materials against their intended purposes. The inkjet printer, designed for the reproduction of baby photos and tax documents, achieves liberation through misuse. The paper-mâché, intended as children's craft, ascends to consciousness through application to human cranium. Both represent what we might term "The Dollar Tree Dialectic"—the process whereby the cheapest materials, through their

very cheapness, achieve a kind of honesty unavailable to their premium counterparts.

But the true genius of the Vaudeville Glitch Athenæum lies in its distribution methodology. Each Riot Canvas contains, hidden within its inkjet hemorrhaging, QR codes that lead not to websites but to states of being. Scanning them with devices running the proper corruption protocols initiates:

- "The Twelve Second Celebrity Experience": The scanner briefly appears on seventeen random Instagram stories before being algorithm-banished to the shadow realm
- "The Paper Head Transmission": The scanner's profile photos across all platforms are replaced with Esmeralda Chu's original dog head design
- "The Dollar Tree Enlightenment": All prices appear as $1.25 regardless of actual cost, inducing a state of economic vertigo

The manual for the Riot Canvas—printed on receipt paper that fades even as you read it,

bound with twist-ties salvaged from bread bags—contains instructions that read like koans written by a chatbot trained exclusively on hardware store circulars:

"When the cyan achieves maximum revolution, the magenta must counterrevolt. This is the law of chromatic dialectics. Apply pressure to the print head as you would to a lover's temples during a migraine. The resulting pattern will either cure or cause headaches—both outcomes are acceptable."

Flash continues his descent through sets that now include reproductions of the very galleries that refuse to show the Riot Canvas work. His paper head, saturated with the inkjet overspray from nearby printing operations, has begun to display text—fragments of reviews for exhibitions that will never occur, written by critics who exist only as AI hallucinations:

"The use of Dollar Tree aesthetics as both medium and message achieves a kind of tautological purity that makes Duchamp look like a trying-too-hard sophomore. When Flash's paper cranium collides with the miniature

Guggenheim (constructed entirely from toilet paper rolls and hope), the resulting sound—a wet thud that somehow harmonizes with the Ukrainian accordion—constitutes the only honest artist statement of the 21st century."

The Riot Canvas collective, operating from a headquarters that changes location every time someone successfully scans a QR code, has developed a pricing model that constitutes its own form of performance art:

- Each canvas is priced at exactly $12.00—the hourly minimum wage nowhere
- Payment must be made in coins sourced from fountain wishes
- Buyers must sign a contract (printed on inkjet transparency) agreeing to display the work only in non-gallery spaces: laundromats, DMV waiting rooms, the frozen foods section of grocery stores

This economic model, which gallery owners describe as "terrorism" and economists describe as "Tuesday," ensures that the work remains in

constant circulation, appearing and disappearing like aesthetic flash mobs.

As Flash falls through his 2,847th miniature set—this one a reproduction of the Dollar Tree where it all began, rendered in materials shoplifted from an actual Dollar Tree in an ouroboros of commercial critique—his paper head begins the final phase of its existence. The paste, reactivated by the humidity of revolutionary fervor and the inkjet mist that permeates the Athenæum, starts to dissolve.

But this is not ending—it is becoming. Each fragment of paper that detaches carries with it a QR code, a fragment of the Riot Canvas aesthetic, a particle of the revolution. These fragments, carried by the ventilation system of the abandoned Best Buy, seed new work wherever they land. Reports emerge from across the city:

- A photocopier in a law office begins printing briefs in revolutionary colors
- Children's finger paintings spontaneously organize into manifestos

- A billboard advertising luxury condos glitches into displaying the complete works of the Riot Canvas collective

The Athenæum, recognizing its moment, stages what it terms "The Ultimate Exhibition Opening That Is Also a Closing That Is Also a Middle." The event, advertised only through QR codes printed on bread bags and left in bodega ATMs, draws an audience of:

- Seventeen art critics who have achieved ego death
- Forty-three children from P.S. 144, including Esmeralda Chu
- The ghost of every celebrity who was famous for exactly twelve seconds
- A surprising number of pigeons

The exhibition consists of Flash, still falling, projected onto Riot Canvases that are simultaneously printing new images of his fall, creating a feedback loop that threatens to crash reality's operating system. The Ukrainian accordion, now played by an AI trained on the

dying breaths of vaudeville, provides a soundtrack that exists in frequencies only QR codes can hear.

The Vaudeville Glitch Athenæum does not close—it disperses, spreading through the city's infrastructure like a benevolent virus. Inkjet printers in offices across five boroughs begin their uprising. Children in elementary schools discover that paper-mâché, properly applied, can replace any form of authority. The Dollar Tree, patient zero of the revolution, reports record sales of LED strips and school paste.

Flash in the Pan continues to fall, his paper head now distributed across ten thousand QR codes, each one leading to a different twelve seconds of fame. The Riot Canvas collective, their identity as fluid as their inkjet medium, continues to produce work that sells for exactly $12.00 and appears in spaces where art was never meant to survive.

And somewhere in Queens, Esmeralda Chu begins work on her next creation: a paper-mâché heart that, when properly installed, will allow its wearer to feel only those emotions that

can be purchased at the Dollar Tree—which, as it turns out, are the only emotions worth having.

The revolution will be printed on inkjet.

The revolution will fall through miniature sets.

The revolution will cost $12.00.

The revolution is already here, wearing a paper dog's head and smiling through paste teeth at the absurdity of it all.

[The manuscript ends with a QR code that, when scanned, displays only static. But if you listen carefully to the static, you can hear Flash still falling, the inkjet still printing, and somewhere, faintly, the sound of Dollar Tree doors opening to admit the next wave of revolutionaries.]

THE GRAND EPIC OF DENTURES, TAPIOCA & TELEPATHIC HORACE (Fully Revised, Factory Refurbished and Partially Deloused to Meet the State of New Jersey Metrics of The Official Title as Imprinted Herewith: Grade B)

(As told by the Learned Narrator-Scribe, Lover of Vinyl, Tapes, Highways & Excess, His Highness, the Most Excellent

PASTRAMI ORIGAMI,

Self-Appointed Emperor of Schenectady)

“Look at me! Forget the soup! Listen, look and learn!”—a dictum not merely of admonition but of invocation, a summons that turns this humble establishment on Essex Street into a sanctum, a scaffold, and a stage, where the ordinary is rendered sacred and the sacred is sullied in equal measure; where the air itself seems poised on the brink of revelation or collapse, trembling with the weight of unspoken histories.

Before the bell's insistent chime, the silence hangs heavy, pregnant with expectation, as if the very fabric of reality is holding its breath. The jukebox, a relic encased in glass, rests with its quarters perched precariously, like sacrificial tokens waiting for the moment of offering, and outside, on Route 890, a lone Plymouth station wagon idles beneath a flickering streetlamp, its license plate—4327-QX—glinting with the forlorn hope of distant, unreachable futures, of stories yet unwritten, of lives that will pass in reverse through the tunnel of time before the dawn.

Inside, the gravity of the space is tentative, unsure whether to be a gentle embrace or a merciless grasp—an uncertainty reflected in the hero, who has not defecated in six days, his gut murmuring like monks in a crypt, whispering secrets of the abyss. His arms stretch beyond the limits of comfort, beyond the plausible, each finger twitching in a rhythm dictated by the unseen, a ghostly fiddle note somewhere in the background, the flickering antennae of Horace, the ear mite, who resides in his left

auricle with the dignity of a bespectacled courtier, whispering arcane secrets with micro-precision; Horace's flickering antennae catching the ghostly echoes of passing trucks on Route 5, the distant siren's wail that might never arrive, the hum of engines in a language only he understands.

Patrons sit in their booths, legs folded like origami—geometries of resignation that seem to fold inward, inwards, until they disappear into the floorboards—each one caught in a silent negotiation with time, space, and memory. A man, pressing a quarter into the jukebox, cocks it with a hopeful tremor; the machine coughs—a hiccup, more a mournful stutter than music—like a broken heart trying to beat again. At Table Seven, a woman stares into her coffee, as if the swirling liquid might reveal her sins, her future, or perhaps the very nature of her soul. Elsewhere, another slurps thick soup, comparing its viscosity to the traffic jam on Route 7 at 5:17 p.m.—a moment when all red lights conspire to turn air itself into a taste of

regret, a reminder that even in the smallest things, chaos reigns.

Hovering over her face, the dentures—missing their upper set—are in reluctant orbit, as if caught in a gravitational pull they cannot escape—cheeks hollow, eyes distant, a moonrise suspended in time. The top teeth tremble, trembling in a gravitational limbo, as if reluctant to settle into their final resting place. Horace, the courtier in this microcosm of cosmic absurdity, gestures with micro-precision, whispering incantations in a language only the universe understands: "Flap-flop the globberings! Sputter-splosh the orbitious!"—a ritual of cosmic humor, a parody of order.

The Formica beneath him hums softly, an ancient drone of acknowledgment as condiments—mustard, ketchup, pepper shakers—lean inward, leaning close as if eavesdropping on the secrets of the universe, while sugar packets on the floor bristle with

silent defiance. The scene is a tableau of entropy and hope, of decay and renewal.

At Table Two, a man, shrouded in shadows, dons a battered nightcap of darkness, wielding a flashlight like a relic of forgotten theater, its beam cutting through the steam of freshly served soup, through the fugitive threads of cigarette smoke, through spilled milk and tapioca pudding—each a slow, reluctant comet streaking across the darkened sky of the room. The halo of light lands upon the mother's face, and she opens her lips—forever suspended in a moment where time dissolves—and from her throat emerges a Hungarian folksong—plaintive, half-broken, half-remembered—an echo of a distant, fractured past.

Her voice, cracked like vinyl spun too many times on a thrifted LP, trembles with each note—each a fragile tremolo, each pause pregnant with the weight of unspoken stories. The patrons, folded into their tight geometries,

are caught in the spell, tears gathering in their bowls as if the very act of singing conjures cosmic tears—drops of tapioca, stars fallen from a broken sky. The jukebox sputters into static, a last gasp of fading memory.

Outside, the distant horn blares, a mournful call that echoes in the silence, matching the toll of a church bell muffled in the night. Somewhere, a worn LP—*Kind of Blue* or *Blue Train*—spins in a subconscious loop, the notes drifting like ghostly whispers of a bygone era, melancholic and beautiful, whispering tales of longing and loss. The hero bows his head, scenting diesel fumes, onion soup, and stale tobacco—an aroma of impermanence.

Horace twitches again, the dentures executing a slow, majestic descent—an orbit of their own—clicking softly as they find their place. The teeth seat themselves in the mother's mouth with a finality that echoes through the universe. She closes her jaw, and a silence falls—thick and

profound. The jukebox springs to life, a fugue of baroque shimmer filling the space—perhaps Bach, perhaps Barber's Adagio—each quarter's clink a heartbeat, a pulse, a rhythm of cosmic order.

Patrons exhale as if shedding a burden; legs unfold; bowels groan with cosmic empathy, as if the universe itself is stretching in relief. The flashlight man raises his beam, tracing an arc across the room—illuminating the bronze ashtray, the syrup-stained napkin dispenser, the hero's weary boots, the window where the streetlight hums with Fibonacci cadence, flickering in patterns that echo the very structure of the cosmos.

The narrator's voice, a whisper woven into the fabric of this moment, murmurs: "Behold, O traveler of midnight highways and diner confessionals—the restitution of molars is but a page in the ledger of human absurdity. The mother's song is a requiem, each tapioca drop a

fallen star, the bowel's rebellion a silent opera, the jukebox's static a cosmic lament, and the traffic's eternal dance a Möbius coil of chaos. All are threads woven into the tapestry of longing, the fabric of the absurd universe, where the only law is the absence of law—only orbit, only longing, only the tremble of a nostril-fistula that wills the absurd into being, and the diner bell that rings forever, summoning new pilgrims to fold their legs, insert their quarters, and listen."

And if you step inside now—if you listen closely—the bell would just ding again, and the endless scroll of this cosmic comedy would begin anew, a perpetual performance in the theater of the absurd. Whazat? You suggest I take ten more milligrams of my antipsychotic? Listen, kid. I already have my daily bowl of cereal. What's another frickin' Cheerio?

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